

CHAMBERLAIN HOLINESS LECTURE 2012

360-DEGREE HOLINESS
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SESSION 2: MODELS OF HOLINESS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

- By the end of this session you should have an understanding of different models of OT holiness and be able to outline reasons why holiness was significant for Israel's covenant relationship

INTRODUCTION

- This session, aims to look at Old Testament views of holiness as we commence an exploration of holiness according to Scripture.

METHODOLOGY

- This aim is admittedly ambitious; the Old Testament, compiled over generations, from a variety of authors, and reflecting a range of interests, offers no unified view of holiness, or any topic. Rather different nuances derive from different parts of the Old Testament.
- Gammie argues that holiness was expressed in different ways with different emphases in the different parts of the Old Testament:

- For the prophets it was ... social justice, for the priests ...proper ritual and maintenance of separation, for the sages it was ...inner integrity and individual moral acts.¹
- Following Gammie, we consider the question of Old Testament views of holiness from the perspective of the priestly, prophetic and wisdom traditions. However, this is not to suggest that there is uniform understanding of holiness even within these traditions.
- Methodologically we draw upon the work of Flood in his study of religion. Flood argues that religion constitutes ‘value-laden narratives and behaviours that bind people in their objectivities, to each other, and to non-empirical claims and beings.’²
- He argues that religious identity constitutes a ‘binding category’³ but that this is not necessarily a tightly defined category. Hence, for example, ‘while it might not be possible to arrive at a watertight definition of Hinduism, this does not mean that the term is empty.’⁴
- Similarly, we will not attempt to arrive at watertight definitions of what are priestly, prophetic and sapiential views of holiness. Nonetheless, this does not mean that these terms are empty.
- Moreover, our concern is not primarily with priestly or prophetic views of holiness. Rather the priestly and prophetic and sapiential approaches are means of interrogating the text with the aim of discerning multiple voices on holiness, rooted in a single tradition.

¹ John G Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 196. cf. also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 2ff who argues for the importance of these three traditions because they were in different ways responsible for the biblical texts as well as sources of religious and intellectual leadership in Israel.

² Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*, (London, Cassell, 1999), 47.

³ cf. Flood, 42ff.

⁴ Flood, 7.

- Hence while there will be diversity in the understanding of holiness across these traditions hopefully commonalities and prototypical features will also emerge which enable the development of a composite sketch of Old Testament views of holiness.

HOLINESS IN PRIESTLY TRADITION

- In exploring the idea of holiness in priestly tradition a variety of texts will be explored but particular attention will be given to Leviticus, especially the Holiness Code in Lev 17–26 which comes to its high point in chap. 19 where the command is given, ‘Be holy for I the Lord your God am holy.’
- Milgrom argues, the theme of the entire book of Leviticus is holiness.⁵ Ross makes even stronger claims:
 - Leviticus was and is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. It not only presents the entire religious system of ancient Israel, but it also lays the theological foundation for the New Testament teaching about the atoning work of Jesus Christ.⁶
- Jenson insightfully argues that holiness in priestly writings is envisaged using at least five differing nuances and models.
 - First, holiness is envisaged in terms of separation, not just negatively (from the impure) but also positively (towards God and for God’s use).
 - Second, in terms of energy or destructive power, e.g., consuming fire, burning bush, dangerous cloud, etc.

⁵ cf. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1397. Hartley is also of a similar view. C.f. John Hartley, *Leviticus*, (Dallas: Word, 1992).

⁶ Allen P Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 15.

- Third, wholly other, i.e., that holiness exceeds everything worldly. (Here we hear echoes of Rudolph Otto's classic argument)⁷
 - Fourth, realm or sphere, i.e. holiness refers to anything or anyone that belongs to God's realm or sphere of existence.
 - Fifth, divine quintessence, i.e. that holiness is the core of God's very being.⁸
- If the third and fourth models were conflated this gives us four areas of focus to consider in exploring holiness in priestly tradition.

HOLINESS AS SEPARATION

- Gammie argues, 'Holiness demands separation.... The notion of separation is pervasive in the priestly traditions of the Bible from the book of Genesis onward.'⁹ (c.f. Num 5.1-4, 6.1-12; Lev 22.1-9 Deut 23.9-14).
- What is less clear is why holiness seems to require separation. Is it because of the fragility of holiness? Impurity entering a holy sphere may profane the holy; and what was once holy may apparently lose its holiness until ritually cleansed (cf. Lev 21.12, Num 19.20).
- Perhaps the separation required by holiness is to do with the idea of belonging to a transcendent God. Alternatively, might the separation have more to do with protection from the consuming power of holiness? This brings us to the second of the nuances.

⁷ cf. Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford: OUP, 1928 in which he argues that holiness is primarily rooted in divine transcendence. As humans seek to understand God we are at best able only to apprehend God's *mysterium*. For Otto, divine holiness is described as the *numen*, or the *numinous*, his philosophical attempt to present the idea of the holy as the essence of divine being.

⁸ cf. Philip Jenson, "Holiness in the Priestly Writings of the old Testament," *Holiness Past & Present* S C Barton (ed.), (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 98ff.

⁹ John G Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 9.

HOLINESS AS ENERGY OR DESTRUCTIVE POWER

- Thomas argues that in priestly tradition the separation required by holiness has more to do with its destructive power than its fragility. In Thomas' view, God willed to live among God's people but for their safety there was needed a *cordon sanitaire* between the holy and dangerous God and the sinful people among whom God chose to dwell. God graciously provided this place of safety in the form of the sanctuary or the Tent of Meeting (cf. Ex 40).¹⁰
- We see examples of this destructive power in the plague sent as punishment for the golden calf (Ex 32.35), Uzzah's death for his unauthorised touching of the ark of the covenant (2 Sam 6.6-11), and the swallowing up of the house of Korah following their rebellion against Moses (Num 16.23-35).

HOLINESS AS CONTAGION

- Related to the idea of holiness as energy or destructive power is the model of holiness as contagion, i.e., that contact with the holy renders objects or places holy. Put simply, holiness is affective.
- Hartley explains: 'God's holiness is contagious. Wherever God's presence is, that place becomes holy...' ¹¹ (e.g. the burning bush, Ex 3, the bronze censers, Num 16.36-38). Hartley argues further:
 - Because only Yahweh is intrinsically holy, any person or thing is holy only as it stands in relation to him. Thus there are degrees of holiness depending on the proximity of an item or person to Yahweh.¹²

¹⁰ cf. Gordon Thomas, "A Holy God Among a Holy People in a Holy Place: The Enduring Eschatological Hope," *The Reader Must Understand* (Eds.) K E Brower & M W Elliott, Leicester: IVP, 1997, 57

¹¹ John Hartley, *Leviticus*, (Dallas: Word, 1992), 312.

¹² Hartley, lvii. cf. also Mary Douglas, *Purity & Danger*, (London: Routledge, 1966), 21ff for more on the idea of sacred contagion.

- It is this concentrated and contagious holiness in close proximity to Yahweh that is potentially destructive of impure objects or persons. Milgrom concedes that an object that comes into contact with the sacred may be rendered holy, however he argues that this does not apply to people.¹³

HOLINESS AS OTHERNESS OR GOD'S SPHERE

- 'If the "holy" is defined as that which belongs to the sphere of God's being or activity, then this might correspond to a claim of ownership, a statement of close association, or proximity to God's cultic presence.'¹⁴
- For example, it may be argued that the Sabbath is holy because God rested on that day and has declared ownership of the Sabbath (cf. Ex 20.8–11). The Sabbath, then, reminds us of God's claim to ownership not only of the Sabbath but also of all time.
- Holiness as otherness or being under God's sphere is key to understanding Israel as a holy people: they are holy because they belong to God, not because they are morally or ethically distinctive in any other way. They are thus to be holy as God is holy.

CORPORATE HOLINESS

- If the people of God are holy by virtue of their belonging to the divine sphere then their holiness is primarily corporate. That Israel constituted the holy people of God did not presuppose that every individual member of the community was holy.

¹³ That those who approach the holy without authorisation may face death is in his view incompatible with the idea of contagious holiness. In his view, death in such circumstances is a punishment and not somehow a side effect of contagious holiness. cf. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 449ff.

¹⁴ Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 48.

- When Old Testament Scripture speaks of Israel as God's holy people (Ex 19.6, Lev 21.8, Num 8.17, Deut 7.6ff, 14.2) that holiness is conceived primarily in corporate terms.
- That they are God's holy people does not preclude the presence of sinful individuals among them. In fact, the sacrificial system with its various means of atonement presupposes individuals who fail to be what they are, God's holy people.

HOLINESS AS DIVINE QUINTESSENCE

- Perhaps the most significant of the models of priestly holiness is the idea of holiness as the divine quintessence. Gammie asserts, 'Holiness in Israel was not first and foremost something for human beings to achieve, but rather that characteristic of ineffability possessed only by God, the Lord of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel.'¹⁵
- Thus God alone is holy and that anything else that may be termed holy is holy only through the action of God himself. Holiness then becomes a mark of the presence of the divine, or an indication of the presence of God's essential characteristic.
- Priestly tradition does not only instruct the community to be holy but gives specific examples of what this means for them. For example, Lev 19 is not particularly concerned about sacrifices, Sabbaths, or sanctuary but rather, concerned about the poor, love for neighbours, integrity, and justice.¹⁶ Exodus 24 & Deuteronomy 22 have a similar focus.

¹⁵ Gammie, 195

¹⁶ cf. Milgrom (2000), 1629ff for similar views.

- What this demonstrates is that love and holiness are intertwined.¹⁷ Holiness is only tangibly expressed and experienced in love (cf. Lev 19.9-13, Deut 24.20-22, Ex 22.21-31). Holiness is therefore an *imitatio dei*, it is to be like God.
- The idea of holiness as divine quintessence implies that holiness is not primarily an ethical or moral term, but neither is it amoral and the example of the priestly writings is that there should be no separation of these two aspects of holiness.¹⁸

SUMMARY

- Holiness is described in priestly tradition using a multiplicity of models precisely because the idea of holiness is complex and no single model sufficient. Nonetheless, we can begin to draw some conclusions regarding holiness in priestly tradition.
- First and foremost, holiness is understood as God's quintessence; it is who God is. This understanding of holiness underpins the other priestly holiness nuances of separation, power and belonging.
- For example, if holiness is divine quintessence, i.e., who God is, it implies close identification of holiness with purity and power. Moreover, if holiness is 'who God is' this makes sense of the idea of holiness as a mark of belonging to the divine sphere. If holiness is 'who God is,' then objects, persons, spaces or times which are described as holy can only be so because they belong to the Holy One and thus in some measure share in or reflect God's holiness.

¹⁷ So argues Hartley, 323. cf. also Milgrom (2000) and Ross (2002) for similar views.

¹⁸ cf. Jenson (2003), 121.

HOLINESS IN PROPHETIC TRADITION

- Holiness for the prophets is a development of priestly tradition.¹⁹

What is striking is the prophetic linking of holiness and social justice. Thomas helpfully asserts:

- ‘The repeated ministry of the prophets during the monarchy is to call Israel back to the standards of Torah, back to the true vocation of being a holy nation in a holy place among whom a holy God lives.’²⁰
- When we think of holiness in prophetic tradition, as Leviticus stands out in priestly tradition so does Isaiah among the prophets.
- Isaiah stands out among the prophets because it which makes most use of the language of holiness. A glance at any concordance will confirm that the word holy (*qâdôsh/hagios*) and its cognates appear more frequently in Isaiah than any other prophetic book.
- Wright observes that among the prophets these two aspects stand out: first the *theological basis*, i.e. God is the axiom and presupposition for all the prophets do and say and second the *social bias*, i.e. the prophets are uniformly on the side of the poor, weak, oppressed and dispossessed.²¹
- This bias is easily observed among the Latter Prophets, such as Isaiah and Amos. We see it also in the Former Prophets, for example, in Nathan’s confrontation of David because of Uriah (2 Sam 12), and in Elijah’ denunciation of Ahab because of Naboth (1

¹⁹ I am persuaded by the view espoused by J Barton, Thomas and Milgrom that the prophets called people back to a standard of conduct with which they should already have been familiar (cf. discussion to follow). This suggests that the prophetic writers assumed the essential elements of what is here described as priestly views on holiness. However, such a conclusion is not necessarily determinative of the relative dates of composition of various sections of the Old Testament.

²⁰ Thomas, 60.

²¹ cf. C Wright, 146.

Kg 21). Under these two headings of *theological basis* and *social bias*, then, we explore further holiness in prophetic tradition.

THEOLOGICAL BASIS

- ‘The Holy One of Israel’ is perhaps the most significant prophetic designation for God, particularly in the book of Isaiah, consistent across proto, deutero and trito-Isaiah (1.4, 5.19, 10.17, 41.20, 54.5). We find this designation also in Jeremiah (50.29, 51.5), Ezekiel (39.7) Habakkuk (1.12, 3.3) and Hosea (11.9). Yahweh is above all, the Holy One of Israel.
- This is not unimportant. The holiness to which Israel is called and the standards of the Holy One to which they are pointed by the prophets is not a novelty but part of their identity and heritage.
- Barton argues that the prophets were not presenting people with previously unknown moral injunctions but calling them back to the morality they should have known well enough already.²² This suggests the prophets assumed the theology of the covenant and took the tradition of the covenant for granted.²³
- The prophets take for granted the essential nature of the God described as the Holy One of Israel. Referring to the Isaianic trisagion (Holy, Holy, Holy) of Isaiah 6 Moberly notes:
 - Such an emphatic formulation is tantamount to a definition of the nature of YHWH and as such its sense is well captured by the

²² cf. J Barton, *Isaiah 1-39*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 58 cf. Thomas for a similar view.

²³ cf. J Barton, 59ff for further discussion of this debate. cf. also Milgrom’s discussion of the antiquity of OT priestly material in Milgrom (1991), 3ff, where he argues strongly that covenant predates prophets. For a recent comprehensive discussion of these issues cf. McConville’s discussion of developments in critical interpretation of Deuteronomy in J G McConville, *Deuteronomy*, (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 21-40.

later formulation within the book of Isaiah that 'his name is holy' (Isa 57.15).²⁴

- If, as Moberly suggests, the prophets take the holiness of God as a given, the things of God are, thus, naturally to be holy. Whether it is God's holy mountain, or holy arm, holy temple, holy anger, holy name, holy land, holy habitation or holy angels, the prophets took for granted that the things of God are holy.
- This was also true of God's people; they were to be holy as God is holy. Moreover, they could only be holy because of the gracious act of the Holy One of Israel; their holiness was derived from God's (cf. 1 Sam 2.2, Deut 7.6, Ex 31.3, Lev 20.7, Ezek 37.27-28).

SOCIAL BIAS

- If human holiness is derived from God's then the nature of human holiness is necessarily informed by the nature of God. Unsurprisingly, the nature of human holiness as perceived by the prophets is closely linked with God's moral integrity.
- That does not imply moral integrity is synonymous with holiness. Indeed, as Toon argues²⁵ it is false to reduce the holiness of God to moral categories alone. Rather morality exemplifies holiness.
- Gammie rightly argues, 'Holiness in Israel was a summons to Israel to aspire to justice and compassion characteristic of her summoning God.'²⁶ It is no coincidence that the role of the prophet comes to the fore during the monarchy. The prophets tended to

²⁴ R W L Moberly, ' "Holy, Holy, Holy": Isaiah's Vision of God,' *Holiness Past & Present* Ed. S C Barton, (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 127.

²⁵ cf. Peter Toon, *Justification & Sanctification* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1983), 38. cf. also Moberly, 127ff.

²⁶ Gammie, 195.

address themselves to the powerful on behalf of the powerless urging them to reconnect justice and holiness.

- This is certainly the case with Amos. His audience was the community in general and the leaders in particular. He spoke to those with privilege and power about the nature of obedience to God in a world ultimately ruled by God²⁷ (cf. Amos 1.6ff, 4.1ff).
- Prophetic tradition thus articulates a model of holiness that is resolute in its demand that all have a place, including those on the margins (e.g. Ezek 11, Jonah 3, Micah 3, Hab 2).
- This is a development from priestly tradition, which seemed keen to exclude all sorts of people, e.g. lepers, menstruating women, the ceremonially unclean, the lame, etc, from the sphere of the holy.
- If the Trisagion of Isaiah 6 exemplifies the theological basis of holiness, the holy way of ch.35 typifies its social bias for Isaiah's view of holiness is inextricably bound with that of social justice.²⁸
- The holy way of Isaiah 35 is a unique expression, hence its meaning can only be determined primarily from its context.²⁹
- Harrelson argues for a novel understanding of Isa 35.8b. In contrast to common readings of the text as a prohibition of the unclean from passing on the highway he understands the text to mean that that the unclean shall not pass it by, i.e., fail to see it.

²⁷ cf. Ward, 178ff.

²⁸ So Gammie argues, 83ff.

²⁹ So argues Beuken, rightly in my view. cf. Willem A M Beuken, *Isaiah II* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 323ff.

- Harrelson thus sees the reference to the unclean not as an indication of their exclusion but of inclusion in this eschatological vision alongside the blind, deaf, lame, and dumb of vv 5-6.³⁰
- On this reading, Isaiah 35 articulates a vision of the return of exiles along a holy highway to become part of a redeemed society, a prototype of new humanity, which is for all people, including those normally excluded from the cult such as the blind, deaf, lame, and dumb and even the unclean.³¹

SUMMARY

- There appears to be an unresolved tension in the idea of holiness in prophetic tradition. On the one hand, holiness is bestowed by God; it is a gracious act. On the other hand, it is the result of or at the very least requires human effort. The social bias of holiness focuses very much on the human effort while its theological basis focuses on the divine dispensation.
- However, it is not an either/or but a both/and. Holiness is undoubtedly the result of divine dispensation. One can be holy only as the result of the gracious act of the Holy One.
- However, the call to social justice points to an understanding of human holiness which requires some effort on the part of individuals and that one is held to account for one's actions.

³⁰ cf. Walter Harrelson, 'Isaiah 35 in Recent Research & Translation,' *Language, Theology & the Bible*, Eds. S E Balentine & J Barton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 249ff.

³¹ So argues Walter Harrelson, 'Isaiah 35 in Recent Research & Translation,' *Language, Theology & the Bible*, Eds. S E Balentine & J Barton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 249-50.

HOLINESS IN WISDOM TRADITION

- Wisdom tradition encompasses a diverse set of writings. There are few obvious similarities between Job and Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon or Ben Sirach.
- No wisdom text is more deeply concerned with holiness than Job. In fact, as we shall see, it may be argued that one sub plot of the story is not merely whether Job is truly as holy and righteous as he appears but rather whether a God who initiates such underserved suffering can rightly be understood to be holy and righteous.

REFLECTING ON JOB'S EXPERIENCE

- The narrator introduces Job as one who was blameless, upright, feared God and turned away from evil (1.1). This assessment is placed on the lips of God on twice more (1.8, 2.3).
- The next 2 verses describe Job's great possessions so that he is the greatest of all people of the east (1.3). The following verses indicate the exceptional level of his pietistic scrupulosity. Job routinely offers sacrifices³² for each of his children to sanctify them in the event that they may have blasphemed God in their hearts.
- The narrator makes no explicit link between these two facts about Job but this is the critical question posed by the satan³³ (1.9), 'Does Job serve God for nothing? Is Job holy in pursuit of or in response to divine blessing?'

³² That Job offers his own sacrifices (1.5) suggests that the story is set in a period prior to the development of the cult and casts Job as a neo-patriarchal figure.

³³ NB: It is well attested that the satan (*ha satan*) here is not to be identified with the Devil, but rather the accuser or prosecutor among the gathering of the sons of God (1.6-12; 2.1-7).

- This is the reason that all that he has is removed. It would be unsatisfactory to both reader and accuser for God merely to assert that Job does indeed fear God for nothing. Now that the question has been raised, it needs emphatically to be addressed. The entire premise of the book, then, is about the question of holiness.
- On this evidence, it seems that the issue of holiness is more relevant than a search for the *qâdôsh* word group might imply. Indeed I contend that Job is an excellent example of reflection on human experience as a means of reflecting on the nature of holiness. The book is also deeply subversive right from the start.

OUTSIDE THE LAND

- Moberly notes that the most positive description of righteousness and holiness in the wisdom tradition, if not the whole biblical tradition, is applied to a man from Uz. Wherever Uz may have been, it was not in Israel.³⁴
- Blomberg makes a similar point, observing: 'Job may well not have been Jewish.'³⁵ This view is further strengthened by the author's use of the Israelite covenant name for God only in the narrative sections of the book, but not in the speeches.³⁶
- Admittedly, it is by no means clear that the land of Israel was a meaningful concept in the time in which the story is set. Job is cast as a neo-patriarchal figure.

³⁴ R W L Moberly, 'Solomon & Job: Divine Wisdom in Human Life.' *Where Shall Wisdom be Found?* Ed. Stephen C Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1999), 9-10. For a similar view see R P Scheindlin, *The Book of Job* (London: W W Norton, 1998), 11f.

³⁵ Craig L Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, Leicester, IVP, 2005, 49.

³⁶ C.f. A van Selms, *Job : A Practical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 5 for a similar view.

- These points notwithstanding, that Job is singled out for being blameless and upright at the very least implies that holiness is not the sole preserve of God's covenant people. Indeed, one may go further and argue that the book implies that in order to find the best example of human holiness one is best off looking outside of Israel; indeed this is what God appears to do (1.8, 2.3)!

OUTSIDE THE CULT

- Not only is Job outside of the land, and thus possibly a non-Israelite and outside the covenant, he also is outside the cult. Once afflicted by loathsome sores, likely to have been understood by later Israelite readers to be a form of leprosy, Job would have become unclean and therefore disqualified from participating in the cult.
- It must be acknowledged that the significance in the plot of sores from head to toe is more likely to be about the totality of Job's affliction than about its identification. Nonetheless, that Job is to be found in the ash heap in 2.8 scraping himself with a potsherd, and visible though unrecognisable from a distance (2.12), at the very least suggests that he may be among the outcasts.³⁷
- Careful exegetes will note that Job is described as one who is upright, blameless, fears God and shuns evil in 1.8 and 2.3, both prior to his illness.
- Some might question whether a leprous condition would have made Job unholy as a result of becoming unclean. However, such questions may be laid aside on two counts.

³⁷ Admittedly, the fact that Job's comforters sit with him for 7 days and nights (2.13) followed by lengthy disputations about Job's innocence or guilt undermines any suggestions that Job was completely cut off from society.

- First, the story is not particularly concerned with issues of cultic purity, though it may be admitted that later Israelite readers may have been. Second, such later readers might usefully reflect on the divine rebuke of Eliphaz and his two friends³⁸ in 42.7-8. They are not only rebuked but instructed to
 - take seven bulls and seven rams, go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly... (42.8).
- Job is presented here in the role of both priest and intercessor for his comforters, and referred to by God as ‘my servant Job’ on four occasions, the very designation by which he was singled out as being exceptional at the beginning of the story.
- All of this occurs prior to his restoration in 42.10. There is no suggestion, therefore, that Job’s standing with God, his holiness, is in anyway affected by his illness. In so doing the book offers a radical postulation of a holy leper, perhaps a holy leper-priest!³⁹
- However, this not to say that Job is merely a radical subversive document whose main aim is to challenge the status quo. On the contrary, it is a text which invites reflection on human experiences:
- Is sickness related to sinfulness? Does God care for both Gentile and Jew? Can holiness be found outside the covenant people? Can lepers be holy?

³⁸ Wilson wryly observes that it is surely significant that they are referred to as friends of *Eliphaz* and not of *Job*. See Gerald H Wilson, *Job*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 471

³⁹ See R E Clements *Wisdom in Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, 88-89 for more on this view.

- All of these are in addition to the story's central question, which is not *why* do the righteous suffer innocently? Rather it is *how* should the righteous respond in the face of unjustified suffering?⁴⁰

OUTSIDE THE NORM

- The book of Job does not stop at its radical postulating of a holy Gentile leper; it goes much further. In the story of Job the very idea of God's holiness is explored and we discover God portrayed in a way, which is very much outside the norm.
- After all, it is God who draws Job to the attention of the accuser (1.8, 2.3), God who gives permission to the accuser to cause Job's misery (1.12, 2.6), God who appears to need confirmation of the true reasons for Job's fidelity (1.9–11), God who allows this misery to continue until finally bringing it to an end at 42.10.
- According to von Rad we find in the story of Job (16.7–14),
 - 'God as the direct enemy of men, delighting in torturing them, hovering over them like what we might call the caricature of a devil, gnashing his teeth... and splitting open Job's intestines.'⁴¹
- Carl Jung goes even further in his seminal 1952 book *Answer to Job*. He argues: 'From the human point of view Yahweh's behaviour is so revolting that one has to ask oneself whether there is not a deeper motive hidden behind it.'⁴² Jung goes on to add:
 - One must bear in mind here the dark deeds that follow one another in quick succession: robbery, murder, bodily injury with premeditation, and denial of fair trial. This is further exacerbated by the fact that Yahweh displays no compunction, remorse, or

⁴⁰ c.f. D J A Clines, *Job 1–20*, Dallas: Word Book, 1989, xxxviii.

⁴¹ von Rad, 217. For a similar view c.f. D J A Clines, *Job 21–37* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1037.

⁴² Carl G Jung *Answer to Job* (London: Routledge, 1987, 20.

compassion, but only ruthlessness and brutality. ...he flagrantly violates at least three of the commandments he himself gave out on Mount Sinai.⁴³

- In this encounter divine sovereignty and human responsibility collide. Wisdom tradition holds both these ideas in tension⁴⁴ in the story of Job. The book makes it clear from the beginning that Job's fortunes for good and ill are in the hand of God.
- At the end of the story when God does finally answer Job, no justification is offered for divine actions in allowing these hardships to befall him, nor is Job allowed to see that his misfortunes are the result of a divine test of his pietistic motivation. Instead, divine sovereignty is reaffirmed and Job challenged for his audacity in questioning divine action.
- However, human responsibility is also upheld. Throughout the story Job holds on to his integrity and rejects the idea that since God is sovereign God can do whatever God likes. Rather Job challenges God to justify divine actions and desires his day in court so that he can protest his innocence (19.23–29).

SUMMARY

- At least three significant insights into holiness may be gleaned from the experiential reflection of the sages.
- First, holiness for the sages is internalised. One is not holy because of what is on the outside but what is on the inside. Job, though possibly a Gentile leper living in an unholy land, is nonetheless able to be holy and to retain his holiness despite all that befalls him.

⁴³ Jung, 22.

⁴⁴ See Bergant, 46 and Clements, 167 for similar views.

- Second, as a result of this internalisation, holiness cannot be circumscribed by covenant or cult. Even those outside of both can be holy, not least because God is not circumscribed by covenant or cult. It is worth noting that both of these themes are picked up on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels.
- Third, holiness represents a tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. How do we know that Job is holy? Because God describes him as such on a number of occasions (1.8, 2.3). Put another way, Job is holy because God declares him to be holy. This is the divine sovereignty pole.
- At one and the same time Job's holiness is preserved because of his efforts. He does not sin with his lips (2.10) despite all that befalls him, he speaks of God what is right (42.7), and he maintains his integrity and blamelessness (9.20-21).
- The Joban authors offer us a perspective into holiness which is not couched in terms of victory over sin but in terms of perfection, integrity and the fear of the Lord sustained even *in extremis*.
- Perhaps, above all, Job reveals to us a holiness that may be internal and thus invisible to human eyes, especially ones doubting the motives for his fidelity. However, it is his actions, especially in extreme circumstances which reveal what truly lies within.

PULLING TOGETHER COMMON ELEMENTS

- Priestly, prophetic and wisdom traditions of holiness are not in parallel. Rather they are interwoven strands emerging from a common experience and identity. Across the traditions elements of

commonality may be observed which together offer a prototypical construct of an Old Testament understanding of holiness.

HOLINESS ROOTED IN GOD

- The primary area of commonality is that holiness is rooted in God; it is God's quintessential nature. All of the other discussions and nuances of holiness are predicated upon this basic understanding.
- Objects persons, times or spaces are holy only insofar as they relate to, participate in, or reflect the holiness of the Holy One. Indeed the prophets remind us that God is the *Holy One*; God alone is holy. Even the sages eventually conclude that God is holy despite human experiences which might appear to indicate the contrary.
- What this means is that holiness in the human sphere is possible only as the result of a gracious divine act. Holiness presupposes relationship to the Holy One; indeed God is the Holy One *of Israel*.

HOLINESS IN CONDUCT AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

- If the primary nuance of holiness in the Old Testament is that of holiness rooted in God, other nuances of holiness flow out from this basic conception. Since holiness is rooted in God, holy people reflect God's character.
- Holiness, though internalised, becomes visible in the way in which holy people conduct themselves. We see this in Job's conduct, in the demands of priests and prophets for justice, and in the idea of the fear of the Lord.
- A development of this understanding of human holiness expressed in conduct and experience is the tension between divine

sovereignty and human responsibility. Nothing can be holy apart from divine action and yet it is difficult to deny that there is in the Old Testament consistent encouragement to pursue holiness.

HOLINESS AS PERFECTION AND WHOLENESS

- The priestly focus on perfection and wholeness requiring the exclusion from the cult of all that is unclean or imperfect may appear to modern sensibilities as unkind if not morally suspect. However, such an understanding does point to the idea of holiness as perfection and wholeness, i.e., that which is *ideal*.
- The description of Job as *tawm*, blameless and complete, the idea of the fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom, combined with the perfection requirements of the cult all point us to the fact that holiness is ultimately a call to wholeness and perfection, i.e., a call to resemble the God who has called us.
- From the Old Testament witness, then, we see a view emerging of holiness rooted in God, lived out in God's people, in order to reflect God's character, leading ultimately to wholeness and perfection, which is to say creation as divinely intended.

REFLECTION

- What might we learn from OT models of holiness and how might this be relevant for the mission of the church today?